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CIA induced Russian to defect: Japan press

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TOKYO (Reuters)—The CIA, with the help of a British intelligence agent, prompted the defection of a Russian pilot with his MIG-25 fighter plane five years ago so the West could study the craft, the Kyodo news agency said Sunday.

The news agency, quoting unnamed Japanese security officials, said Central Intelligence Agency officials, in a secret mission in Moscow, offered Soviet Lt. Viktor Belenko political asylum in the United States in return for a fully equipped MIG-25. Belenko now lives in the U.S. under a new identity.

The CIA refused Sunday to comment on the Kyodo report, and no official Japanese comment was immediately available.

THE PILOT FLEW the supersonic interceptor, called the "Foxbat," to a civilian airport on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido on Sept. 6, 1976. The plane was airlifted to an airport near Tokyo, where U.S. and Japanese experts examined it for two months

before returning it to the Soviets.

U.S. experts said it wasn't as sophisticated as intelligence reports had indicated. They said it was heavier than expected, its electronic system was behind U.S. technology, and it was ineffective against low-flying U.S. bombers.

Kyodo quoted Japanese officials as saying an agent of the British Foreign Office's M-16 intelligence department first approached the Russian pilot at a Moscow bar in October, 1974.

KYODO SAID the Russian pilot was approached after he made a demonstration flight at the world aviation show in London the previous month.

Contacts were then taken over by a CIA agent and continued with three to four more CIA agents until the pilot was transferred to Sokolovka air base 1,000 miles east of Moscow.

A decision on the proposed defection was left to the pilot's discretion after he was given his new assignment, where he was the commanding officer of a flight unit, it added.